



Early Journal Content on JSTOR, Free to Anyone in the World

This article is one of nearly 500,000 scholarly works digitized and made freely available to everyone in the world by JSTOR.

Known as the Early Journal Content, this set of works include research articles, news, letters, and other writings published in more than 200 of the oldest leading academic journals. The works date from the mid-seventeenth to the early twentieth centuries.

We encourage people to read and share the Early Journal Content openly and to tell others that this resource exists. People may post this content online or redistribute in any way for non-commercial purposes.

Read more about Early Journal Content at <http://about.jstor.org/participate-jstor/individuals/early-journal-content>.

JSTOR is a digital library of academic journals, books, and primary source objects. JSTOR helps people discover, use, and build upon a wide range of content through a powerful research and teaching platform, and preserves this content for future generations. JSTOR is part of ITHAKA, a not-for-profit organization that also includes Ithaka S+R and Portico. For more information about JSTOR, please contact support@jstor.org.

danger faced and conquered some way, calm descends. Until the next flutter of the same kind the pupils again read nothing. At least, they read only those books and magazines whose highly colored decorations remind one of the violet colored wrappers in which harmful toilet articles are offered to gullible womankind.

In the face of this situation some other method of getting pupils to read seems desirable. Individual recommendation generally succeeds, for girls and boys who like to read really desire guidance. To be sure, they cannot all appreciate *Les misérables*, or *Henry Esmond*, or *The Mill on the Floss*. Nevertheless, many of those who are able to do so have never heard of these books, and their pleasure in reading them is always manifest. Those who do not enjoy books are often young persons in whose reading no one has ever taken any interest. To many of the latter a book like *The Prince and the Pauper*, *Little Women*, *The Story of a Bad Boy*, *The Secret Garden*, or *Treasure Island* opens, if not a new heaven, at least, a new earth.

This method seems but a substitute for what could be done in an English course. Yet, after all, it is satisfactory. It quickens the imaginations of the readers and deepens their sympathies. It helps them to see a difficulty more easily and, perhaps, to find the way out. It shows some of the mentally stagnant that the world is not bound by their narrow horizons. Best of all, it gives to these growing minds a source of pleasure and profit which will never fail.

It would appear that we can no longer dodge the question. A large proportion of school children come from homes where their reading is not guided. We cannot trust most English courses to cultivate in boys and girls a reading taste for what is worth while. If the individual teachers do not accomplish this, who will?

HELEN FERRO

WASHINGTON IRVING HIGH SCHOOL
NEW YORK CITY

INSPIRATIONAL THEME-GRADING

Upon entering our state university, I was initiated into the daily theme system. Up to that time, I had written a few "papers" and "essays," usually graded on the merit of the thought set forth in them. "Themes," examined according to a mysterious standard of excellence as to style, organization of thought, power of sincere expression, good taste, or what not, were new to me.

The work of writing daily themes proved not to be irksome; in fact

it was often something of a delight. Moreover, after the theme was written and submitted to the instructor, there was that tintillating excitement of suspense a gambler knows. Happy chance, good fortune, a kind Providence, be it hoped, would reward conscientious effort to write. An accident of fate, possibly a temporary mood of our instructor, might prove disastrous to his appreciation of our efforts. Upon receiving a theme graded B, or, better still, A, one accepted his winning in the game of chance he was playing, and set his stakes with fresh zest. Losing occasionally quelled his zeal not at all. Recurring bad luck, however, either discouraged a student utterly, or drove him to the degrading policy of deliberately studying his instructor's taste, in order that he might, perchance, if I may say it, tickle the fastidious palate of him whom he would please. "I always got A in my themes before. This year my teacher does not seem to like my work. I have tried everything I could think of to please her. I wonder what she does like."

When I became a teacher and began to grade themes, the tables were turned. Five years of more or less hit-and-miss grading were enough to confirm my belief in the appalling statement of Jacob C. Tressler, in his article on "The Efficiency of Student Correction of Composition," *English Journal*, September, 1912: "In marking theme number one, English teachers varied from 45 per cent to 80 per cent . . . in marking theme number five, English teachers varied from 65 per cent to 98 per cent." What if the same hundred themes should be placed in one teacher's hands several times, far enough apart for him to have forgotten his former marks? Is there an English teacher who would risk his reputation on such a test as that of the consistency of his own standard of excellence in composition? For my own part, it seems necessary to mark a whole set of papers at one sitting. Otherwise, tomorrow's standard of excellence may vary from today's, and so work injustice to individual students.

In "Standardizing Measurements of Composition," *English Journal*, November, 1912, Ernest C. Noyes, observes truly enough:

Our present methods of measuring compositions are controlled too much by personal opinion, which varies with the individual. In his plea for a "clear cut, concrete standard of measurement," Mr. Noyes argues that a generally adopted scale will aid teachers in trying out methods intelligently and will make it possible for employers "to define the degree of excellence expected in an applicant for a position."

I believe much harm is done by opinion-guided criticism. Here is the testimony of a former English teacher:

After several years of teaching, I took graduate work and once more submitted my own efforts for self-expression to superior intellects. Needless to say, I had lost faith in grades. Nevertheless, I resented the treatment my work received, not because the grades were not sufficiently high, but because it seemed to me my instructors presumed upon their rights as critics. They trespassed where I felt, rightly or wrongfully, they should not have entered at all. To put it more clearly, perhaps, I did not thank them for their personal opinion regarding my convictions. One's convictions are, to one's self at least, too sacred to be rated off hand by anyone else. One or two experiences with that kind of grading taught me to write distantly and impersonally, a change which, by the way, was quickly noticed and commented on adversely.

If a mature student, with the confidence of experience and some degree of indifference to grades, shrinks from cold, critical appraisal of creations which most truly reveal the inner man, what may one expect of the youth who puts forth his first efforts with misgivings enough?

As teachers we desire our students to express themselves naturally, freely, honestly. Then we must remember that a boy's composition, written to the end of perfect self-expression, is a child of his thought, and we can do nothing less than receive it tenderly and nurture it carefully.

In my teaching, I was confronted by two problems: (1) How shall I cut off the head of any error and sear the place, so that that error will never grow again? (2) How shall I follow the advice of the Irishman who said, "If ye find a shpark of heavenly fire, wa-terr it, wa-terr it"?

Two propositions led to an answer to both. First, a task must be defined exactly in the mind of him who is to do it, if his work shall prove creditable; second, a task, to be inspiring, must be difficult. A hill outside a city will not call many from their dwellings to climb to its summit; but a snow-capped peak will stir the secret ambition of the laziest to put it beneath their feet. What is the goal of a theme-writer? Nothing less than perfection. Let a teacher point to a perfectly accomplished task as a feat within the powers of each member of his class, and his work is done.

The plan hit upon was this:

A—Perfection in technique plus some other good quality or qualities.

B—Perfection in technique.

C—One mistake in technique.

Fail—More mistakes in technique.

Technique—Form, neatness, spelling, grammar, punctuation, punctuation. This much handicap was given: anyone could have his rough

draft corrected by the teacher before making a final copy. The plan worked. A hitherto scarcely used conference period in the teacher's schedule was filled. To avoid the rush, students frequently wrote their weekly theme several days before it was due and had it corrected so that they could copy it at their leisure. Students whose work had been mediocre and without progress began to hear the call, "Excelsior."

After nearly two years' experience with the plan outlined, I cannot conceive of returning to the old method of theme-correction, which really was no method at all. The merits of the plan I use now are greater than I had foreseen. It can be used by student critic as well as by a teacher. It is a time-saver, in that careless mistakes are eliminated, and the teacher may read rapidly watching for good effects. It is adapted to any class and to each individual of a class. It does not, therefore, act like a mill, producing uniform results. The individuality of students is not interfered with. The student understands whatever correction is made and feels neither resentment nor disappointment. He realizes that his effort for self-expression has been treated with justice and respect. Because perfection of technique is not the acme of perfection, most girls and some boys, otherwise satisfied with imitative work, guided by rules of form and structure, learn that they must aim beyond erudite production. Removal of technical mistakes by the teacher in conference, previous to final copying, results in formation of good habits. More than that, a conference concerning a theme in the making gives the teacher an opportunity to mention appreciatively the really successful parts of the theme. The student returns from such a conference unharmed, grateful, inspired to call his best powers into play.

The ardor of a budding genius, who is hampered by inability to spell or to write legibly is not dampened. He is given his rightful recognition. Most important of all is the moral effect of such a system upon every student. His mettle is tried; justice is meted out to him. He is no longer a gambler; he is an honest toiler. He is obeying the greatest command ever given: "Be ye perfect."

HARRIET A. HARVEY

RACINE HIGH SCHOOL
RACINE, WISCONSIN